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The **MJRMS** is an online student-run academic journal affiliated with the WUSC McGill local committee. Our main goal is to complement WUSC's work on campus by raising awareness about refugee and migration issues. We also serve as a platform for undergraduate and graduate students who wish to publish their work and highlight important issues regarding refugees and migration.

La **RERMM** est une revue scientifique étudiante en ligne sous le parrainage du comité local mcgillois de l'EUMC. Notre but premier est de soutenir le comité local de l'EUMC à l'Université McGill à promouvoir les droits des réfugiés et des migrants. De plus, nous sommes une plateforme qui aide les étudiants au 1er cycle et aux cycles supérieurs à publier leur recherche sur les réfugiés et la migration.

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Determining the Views of the Panamanian Indigenous Maje Embera Drua on Environmental and Biodiversity Changes

Gabriel Yahya Haage and April Lee*

Abstract

The Bayano region, with the most prominent feature being the Bayano reservoir, created when a hydroelectric dam was erected in 1976, has faced much ecological and social upheaval. The reservoir flooded the lands of neighboring Indigenous Kuna and Embera groups. This led to the relocation of several Indigenous communities. This paper examines the Maje Embera Drua (community) who live along the Maje river, connected to the artificial Bayano lake. The poor quality of the lake, exemplified by abundant algae and low oxygen, directly impacts the Maje Embera's activities like transportation and fishing. Beyond the impacts of the dam, larger scale climatic changes have certainly affected the members of these communities. Past work on other communities has noted that individuals may see change in terms of unpredictability, rather than clear shifts. Does this apply to the Indigenous Maje Embera? In this paper, 21 Maje Embera were surveyed to discover whether they have noticed environmental changes in the past 10 to 15 years, what kinds of changes they noticed in terms of the duration of rainy and dry seasons as well as the timing of the start and ends of these seasons. Furthermore, individuals were asked whether they perceived changes in abundances in different types of animals, including fishes, birds and reptiles. Pearson's Chi-squared goodness of fit as well as Cochran's Q statistical tests were conducted to address these questions. The results show most participants noticed the climate changing in the last 10 to 15 years, and a significant number of participants considered the changes to be unpredictable, both in length and timing of the seasons. Most participants noticed changes in the

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abundances of animals and this was true regardless of the type of animal that was discussed. In summary, the Maje Embera community was well aware that there were changes, saw them as largely unpredictable, and clearly noticed changes in the abundance in many types of animals. Future studies should expand by surveying more participants from this and other communities.

Introduction

Changes in climate and biodiversity have become a pressing problem globally. Furthermore, feeling a lack of predictability is a common concept regarding issues related to a changing climate. The impacts of climate change can be quite variable and not necessarily easily expressed by those affected. The idea that the changes in climate lead to unpredictable weather and that individuals noticed these changes has been described in several studies. For instance, in a study in Kenya on farmer adaptations to climate change, a large proportion of participants picked the category of "unpredictable precipitation" when discussing the effects of climate change.[1] Similarly, in research on Malawi agriculturalists, the authors cite a farmer as explaining, "[the] times are changing and the rains are unpredictable, and it is good to have many crops in case maize fails."[2] A study on a population in Northern Ghana also pointed at unpredictability

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[1] Evelyn J. Mutunga, Charles K. Ndungu, and Patricia Muendo, "Smallholder farmers perceptions and adaptations to climate change and variability in Kitui county, Kenya," *Journal Earth Science and Climate Change* 8, no. 3 (2017).

[2] Rachel B. Kerr et al., "Knowledge politics in participatory climate change adaptation research on agroecology in Malawi," *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 33, no. 3 (2018).

as an important factor affecting them.[3] In fact, unpredictable weather is the leading constraint "impeding climate change adaptation and evaluation."[4] The idea of climate change resulting in unpredictable change is also seen in the city. For instance, one of Steynor's et al. informants stated that "high unpredictability in weather changes" is linked to climate change.[5]

Biodiversity loss is also a pressing problem and is predicted to worsen.[6] However, in many cases, people are unaware a nearby species is endangered or declining in population.[7] Different individuals can also have differing understandings of the level of an endangered species.[8] Furthermore, predominantly large and charismatic vertebrates

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[3] Clifford Fagariba, Shaoxian Song, and Serge K. G. S. Baoro, "Climate change adaptation strategies and constraints in Northern Ghana: Evidence of farmers in Sissala West District," *Sustainability* 10, no. 5 (2018): 1484.

[4] Fagariba, Song, and Baoro, 13.

[5] Anna Steynor et al. "Learning from climate change perceptions in southern African cities," *Climate Risk Management* 27, no. 100202 (2020).

[6] Micheal R. W. Rands et al. "Biodiversity Conservation: Challenges Beyond 2010," *Science* 329, no. 5997 (2010).

[7] Judith Denkinger, Diego Quiroga, and Juan Carlos Murillo, "Assessing Human–Wildlife Conflicts and Benefits of Galápagos Sea Lions on San Cristobal Island, Galápagos," in *The Galapagos Marine Reserve: A Dynamic Social-Ecological System*, eds. Judith Denkinger and Luis Vinueza (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 285-305; Jessica L. Fort, "Large carnivore occupancy and human-wildlife conflict in Panamá" (master's thesis, Southern Illinois University, 2016); Dinal J S Samarasinghe, "The Human-Crocodile Conflict in Nilwala River, Matara (Phase 1)," YZA Publications (2014); Jesse Senko et al. "People helping turtles, turtles helping people: Understanding resident attitudes towards sea turtle conservation and opportunities for enhanced community participation in Bahia Magdalena, Mexico." *Ocean and Coastal Management* 54, no. 2 (2011): 148-157.

[8] Fort, 2016; Catherine M. Hill, "Conflicting attitudes towards elephants around the Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda," *Environmental Conservation* 25, no. 3 (2002): 244-250.

are used in documents discussing biodiversity loss and conservation advocacy.[9] As such, one may ask whether a community has noticed changes in animal abundance and whether they see these changes equally in different types of animals.

Study site: The Embera and Environmental Instability

An overview of the Bayano region will give context to this research. The Bayano river region is a portion of the tropical forest zone called the Darien. The Darien is spread over both the Department of Choco in Colombia and the Province of Panama in the Republic of Panama. More specifically, the Bayano takes up a large part of the District of Chepo, in Panama.

As of 2010, the Embera are the third largest group among the Indigenous groups of Panama, residing in several regions of the nation, including the Bayano region.[10] While *Comarcas* (reserves) exist for the Embera in Panama, these do not extend to the Bayano region. Among the Embera communities heavily impacted by changes in the region, there are Ipetí, Piriati, Unión, and Maje, with this study focusing on the Maje Embera Drua (community), who live along the Maje river, which connects to the artificially created Bayano lake.[11]

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[9] Stephen R. Keller, "Social and Perceptual Factors in the Preservation of Animal Species," in *The Preservation of species : the Value of Biological Diversity,* ed. Bryan G. Norton (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 50-73; Kelly K. Miller, Euan G. Ritchie, and Michael A. Weston, "The Human Dimensions of Dog–Wildlife Interactions," in *Free-Ranging Dogs and Wildlife Conservation*, ed. Matthew E. Gompper (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286-304.

[10] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Kuna Indigenous People of Madungandi and Embera Indigenous People of Bayano and their Members, Panama,* 125/12, Washington, D.C., USA: IACHR, 2012.

[11] IACHR, 2012.

Originally, the Embera came from what is modern-day Colombia, and comprises one of the two linguistic groups of the Indigenous Choco people, the other segment being the Wounaan.[12] As the control of the Kuna people faded in Darien because of the Spaniards, the Choco began their migration into the area. However, Spanish gold mining projects subjected the Indigenous people to forced labor as well; thus, most likely in the 18th century, the Choco migrated to Southeastern Darien, where they settled in dispersed patterns.[13] Although the Embera did not organize around a central leader, the *noko* (head of the extended family) and *jaimbana* (shaman) were key figures.[14] Horticulture was important to their subsistence, and according to the study of their history by Bilbao and Kane, the people were bonded by their mythical and symbolic cosmology.[15] Beginning in the 1950s, for better access to the market to sell produce, some of the Embera moved into the Bayano region.[16] Families were loosely scattered in the Majecito village and other sites in the region. In 1961, Jose Castillo, the head of the first Embera family that took residence in the region, brought the Embera families in the area to form a village called Majecito. The village produced corn, rice, plantains, and from the 1970s onwards, legumes and beans as well.[17] In 1968, at the First National Indigenous

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[12] IACHR, 2012.

[13] Alaka Wali, *Kilowatts and crisis among the Kuna, Choco, and Colonos: National and regional consequences of the Bayano hydroelectric complex in Eastern Panama* (London, UK: Westview Press, 1989).

[14] Wali, 1989.

[15] Wali, 1989.

[16] Alaka Wali, "In Eastern Panama, Land is the Key to Survival," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1989): 25.

[17] Wali, 1989.

Congress of Panama, the Embera selected a Cacique (chief) for the first time, adopting the system of the Kuna.[18]

Land had already been sparse in the area by the time Castillo's family arrived. There had been tensions between colonists and the Kuna that had settled beforehand.[19] In the mid-1900s, deforestation was already a problem, although it was more local and most problematic in the colonist settlements of Chepo and Canitas at the time.[20] On the other hand, in the 1970s, the Indigenous communities saw major upheavals with the initiation of the Bayano Hydroelectric complex project which accelerated changes in the ecological milieu. The project was conceived in 1963, and carried out for four years between 1972 and 1976.[21] It was decided that the upper Bayano would be flooded and the Kuna and Embera were made to relocate between 1973 and 1975.[22] That the dam would be built was pre-determined by the government, so negotiations with the Indigenous peoples focused on where they would be relocated.[23] Furthermore, the extension of the Pan American Highway of 1974 attracted new settlers, who encroached on the lands of the Embera.[24] The Embera land was not promptly demarcated.[25] Only recently did some Embera settlements receive official recognition as "collective lands". This was limited to

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[18] IACHR, *Kuna Indigenous People of Madungandi*, 2012.

[19] Wali, *In Eastern Panama*, 1989.

[20] Wali, 1989.

[21] IACHR, *Kuna Indigenous People of Madungandi,* 2012.

[22] IACHR, 2012.

[23] IACHR, 2012.

[24] IACHR, 2012.

[25] IACHR, 2012.

the Pirati and the Ipetí lands, which received the new status in 2014 and 2015, respectively.[26]

For the reasons delineated above, the Maje Embera Drua (community) in Bayano has faced unprecedented manifestations of environmental destruction. The destruction was felt by the community, as also discussed in a workshop with Maje Embera community members.[27] The creation of Bayano lake has reduced the abundance of once common fish species and its greater algal content has made travelling on the water more difficult.[28] Furthermore, the opening up of the region has led to massive deforestation. The construction of the dam was coupled with the opening of the Bayano Bridge in late 1974, and motivated the construction of a Pan-American Highway segment nearby;[29] both roadways accelerated logging. A report by the World Bank gives an account on the Pan-American Highway: "[the] access roads (40 km) to the dam site opened the reservoir area and its surroundings to an influx of people and uncontrolled logging took place threatening the forests and the Indigenous people which inhabited the area."[30] To the Maje Embera, deforestation meant a loss of territory that was vital to their way of life,

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[26] Mathieu Guillemette et al. "Building a common description of land cover in a tropical watershed plagued with intercultural conflicts: The value of participatory 3D modelling," *FACETS* 2 (2017): 195-211.

[27] Gabriel Yahya Haage, *Developing a Child-Centered Water Poverty Index: General Guidelines and the Case Study of the Bayano Region, Panama (Version 1.0)* (Montreal, Canada: Building21, 2019).

[28] Yahya Haage, 2019; Wali, *In Eastern Panama*, 1989.

[29] Will Miller, *Historical Logging in Eastern Panama: Genesis of a Social-Ecological Landscape* (Montreal, Canada; Panama: McGill University; Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), 2014); World Bank Group, *Panama: Vulnerability, Risk Reduction, and Adaptation to Climate Change* (Washington DC: USA: World Bank, 2011).

[30] World Bank Group, 2011.

including in their ethnobotany.[31] The Embera have lived in small kinship groups and, as such, change could be seen as unpredictable to any of their smaller settlements.[32] Well into the most recent decade, in addition to environmental threats, there were continued territorial disputes, numerous renegotiations over unmet promises of the government, petitions, and demonstrations.[33]

An important aspect that must be explored is whether the environmental issues, including the deforestation and the flooding of land in the 1970s, have had impacts for the community and how they perceive these environmental issues. Of course, standing water and illnesses like malaria, as well as water turbidity from ongoing deforestation are key issues in such cases. It has long been known that such effects have made the waterways used by communities of the region unsanitary and difficult to navigate.[34] In terms of the Maje Embera Drua, they consider environmental issues as the cause of greater illness and contaminated waterways.[35] The microclimate of the region was changed by the creation of the dam and the deforestation it expedited; an example is average temperature increases.[36] Continued changes in the ecosystem, such as increasing

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[31] Dan Klooster, Nathan W. Strout, and David Smith, "GIS in the jungle: Experiential Environmental Education (EEE) in Panama," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* (2021): 1-13.

[32] Wali, *In Eastern Panama*, 1989.

[33] Wali, 1989; IACHR, *Kuna Indigenous People of Madungandi*, 2012.

[34] Wali, 1989.

[35] Yahya Haage, *Developing a Child-Centered Water Poverty Index*, 2019.

[36] Wali, *In Eastern Panama*, 1989.

deforestation, have been seen as environmentally detrimental by the Maje Embera community.[37]

Study goals

This paper surveyed individuals of the Indigenous Maje Embera community to test whether "unpredictability" was a common understanding of climate changes in the past 10 to 15 years. After a rapport was established, participants were surveyed to determine whether they considered the changes in climate in the past 10 to 15 years as unpredictable or if they perceived a clear type of change, such as a late or early start to a season. The use of the time frame "10/15 years" was chosen so as to track general trends in people's perceptions. The intermediary for the survey agreed this would be a good approach, rather than asking participants to remember exact dates. In terms of climate unpredictability in Panama, it has been argued that "future climate will increase variability and intensity of extreme events."[38] As such, a scenario in which Panamanians see the changes as unpredictable is conceivable. Finally, the idea that unpredictability could be a common choice for the Maje Embera in this study is possible when one considers events such as the unprecedented flooding in 2010.[39] In contrast to this, however, surveyed individuals may have perceived a clearer, distinct change in their climate, such as an earlier start to the rainy season.

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[37] Yahya Haage, *Developing a Child-Centered Water Poverty Index,* 2019.

[38] World Bank Group, *Panama*, 2011.

[39] "Nacional: Afectados por inundaciones protestan." *La Estrella de Panamá*. (Jan. 15, 2013).

A loss of biodiversity and a decline of species numbers are also occurring in Panama.[40] As such, this paper also explores how the Maje Embera community perceives the change in the abundance of different animals, based on the type of animals considered, such as reptiles, fishes or birds. As the community members interact with and make use of animals in different ways, it is interesting to determine whether changes in numbers of certain animals was seen as more common than others. Rather than only declines in animal abundance, the more general "change in abundance" will be primarily considered since past work with the community revealed that at least some individuals have noticed increases in some species, including invasive species and species feeding on the now plentiful algae in the local water bodies.[41]

Hypotheses

Several hypotheses were tested with the collected data. This study uses "climate" rather than "weather," when discussing the survey results, as informants are asked to think back to the last 10 to 15 years before deliberating a response on any trends. The time frame of 10 to 15 years was used as some participants did not remember clearly when the changes started, but knew it was around that time. All participants were at least 30 years old, except for two, who were in their twenties.

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[40] World Bank Group, *Panama*, 2011.

[41] Yahya Haage, *Developing a Child-Centered Water Poverty Index*, 2019.

The first section sought to understand informants' perceptions of environmental changes (rainy and dry seasons). The related hypotheses are based on the fact that it is difficult to see local environmental impacts of often global environmental problems:

> H1: Participants noticed changes in the climate and related environmental areas in the past years (10/15 years).
>
> H1 null: Participants did not notice changes in the climate and related areas in the past years (10/15 years).
>
> H2: Regarding the timing of the rainy/dry seasons, significantly more participants will consider the change as unpredictable rather than other categories ("rainy season starting early" or "rainy season starting later"). Although the focus here is on unpredictability, this test will also simultaneously test whether the other situations are more commonly perceived.
>
> H2 null: Regarding the timing of the rainy/dry seasons, there will be no difference between categories, namely unpredictability and other situations (changes in timing for the start of rainy or dry seasons).
>
> H3: Regarding the duration of the rainy/dry seasons, significantly more participants will consider the change as unpredictable rather than other categories (longer or shorter seasons). Although the focus here is on unpredictability, this test will also help determine whether the other situations (duration of rainy/dry season) are more commonly perceived.
>
> H3 null: Regarding the duration of the rainy/dry seasons, there will be no difference between categories.

Wildlife biodiversity has certainly changed and here we will consider perceptions of changes in biodiversity. In terms of changes in biodiversity, participants were presented with animal categories (fish, birds, mammals, reptiles) and were asked whether they perceived changes in abundance of these animal types. They were also asked whether there was a general increase or decrease. Maje Embera community members have

elsewhere discussed both decreases and increases in specific species.[42] For instance, the environmental changes have caused increases in the population of certain animals, such as birds who feed on algae.[43] Asking for this perceived overall change in types of animal made the survey easier to answer for the participants, and allowed a more coherent analysis for the entire sample from the studied community. A previous study in the form of a workshop with some community members argues that some members have noticed changes in abundance.[44] It is interesting to note whether the 21 individuals surveyed also noted changes and whether they observed changes in only a few types of animals or equally in all types. The hypothesis for this second section is based on the fact that the community interacts differently with different types of animals. As an example, community members may notice changes in fish abundance more than other types of animals. Notably, only two informants stated they were not involved in fishing. For the others, the men either fished commercially or for sustenance. Women were married to fishermen and were involved in the traditional preparation of fish for meals. As such, Hypothesis 4 can be stated as:

> H4: If participants have observed changes in abundance, there will be a significant difference in the degree of observed changes depending on the type of animal (fishes, birds, mammals, reptiles).
>
> H4 null: If participants have observed changes in abundance, there will be no significant difference in the degree of observed changes depending on the type of animal.

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[42] Yahya Haage, 2019.

[43] Yahya Haage, 2019.

[44] Yahya Haage, 2019.

Methods

Collecting survey data

The 21 surveys took place in summer 2017 and winter 2018 in the Maje Embera Drua. This community lives along the Maje river and routinely uses the Bayano lake and the Maje river for traveling and fishing. The survey's purpose on both occasions was to collect demographic information, information on participants' lifeways, how they used the Bayano lake and the Maje river, and their views regarding environmental changes. The survey questionnaire had both structured and semi-structured questions. In addition, any further explanations a participant might offer during a structured question were noted. The survey asked questions about demographics, links between environmental issues and social problems (illness, poverty, hygiene, social conflict), and their perceptions of the environment. No follow-up with informants has presented itself.

In the end, 21 participants were surveyed, with attempts made, where possible, to target household heads. If there were visitors to a home during the researcher's time there, they were interviewed as well. 16 men and five women were surveyed. The survey was in Spanish and the consent document was read out to participants as literacy rate was low in the community. Certain individuals acted as intermediaries between the surveyor and the participant being surveyed. In 2017, the Cacique (chief)'s brother played this role. In 2018, it was the Cacique himself. These intermediaries helped locate individuals, offer introductions, and, if necessary, translate parts of the survey. While the intermediates were necessary in such a community, one limitation is that they may have had some influence on responses. Another limitation is that the community has a motivation to

advocate for their needs during the sessions. These can include discussing the dangers of invading Campesinos (non-Indigenous Panamanians) and the need to get their land tenure recognized. In terms of the number of households surveyed, the 2017 intermediary suggested there were around 80 households in the region, but many do not live in the region permanently and so tended to be unavailable.

Statistical analysis

After the survey information was collected, Pearson's chi-squared goodness of fit tests were performed to test the hypotheses (using R Studio).The H null suggests there would be no significant difference between categories. Theoretically, the ratio is, for instance, 1:1:1, in which case an informant is just as likely to pick "unpredictable" or "choice two (e.g. longer rainy period)" or "choice three (e.g. shorter rainy period)"; the informant is making a random choice. If the results of the goodness of fit do not clearly indicate which direction results lean towards, post hoc methods would be performed to find which categories fit best. That way the predominant category can be identified. Along with Pearson's chi-squared goodness of fit, Cochran's Q test was also conducted for Hypothesis 4. The latter is useful as it does not have Pearson's chi-squared's assumption of independence. As it turned out, however, participants tended to be unanimous or nearly unanimous in their choices.

Results

In terms of perceptions of climate change in the rainy/dry seasons, the null hypothesis can be rejected, as nearly all participants (20/21) noticed changes in climate in the last 10/15 years (Chi-squared 17.19, df=1, $p<0.0001$). For changes in the timing of the rainy/dry seasons, 18 participants noticed changes and the vast majority (17/18) said the changes were "unpredictable," rather than choosing other response options ("rainy season starts earlier," "rainy season starts later"). As such, the null hypothesis can be rejected and H2 is supported (Chi-squared 30.333, df=2, $p<0.0001$). For H3, changes in the duration of the rainy/dry seasons, the majority of participants (12/19) chose the category "unpredictable." This is a significant difference according to the Chi-squared test (Chi-squared 11.474, df=2, $p<0.01$). For H4, namely, changes in biodiversity (Table 1), the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference in observed changes in abundance across types of animals, cannot be rejected (Chi-squared 0.48649, df=3, $p=0.92185$). Similar results were obtained for Cochran's Q test for the 21 participants ($Q=6.75$, df=3, $p=0.08031$). Furthermore, the change in abundance for each animal category was noticed by most participants in the survey, as shown in Table 1, ranging

Category of Animal	Number of Participants who Observed Changes
Fishes	21
Birds	17
Mammals	18
Reptiles	18

Table 1: The number of participants, out of 21 total participants, who saw a change in abundance per animal category

from 21 to 17 participants. Informants who saw changes in abundance also saw general

decreases in almost all categories of animals. The exception was reptiles, for which two informants saw a general increase and one informant reported a change in abundance of reptiles, but could not say whether it was a general increase or decrease.

Discussion and conclusion

This study demonstrates that the surveyed individuals did notice environmental changes in climate in the past 10 to 15 years. Furthermore, it demonstrates that climate was seen as more unpredictable, both in timing and duration of rainy/dry seasons for the community. As stated in the introduction, this is a common view throughout the world when it comes to communities struggling with climate change.

The results of this study also suggest that outside researchers working with Indigenous individuals may find it helpful to first discuss the potential unpredictability of the changes in climate, rather than immediately attempting to gather precise participant information regarding changes to timing and duration of rainy/dry seasons. In practice, this suggests that those who want to aid such communities be aware of the views of the population, and when possible, measures should target mitigating such instability. Examples of measures that serve this purpose in the Bayano region could be follow-ups

on the government's promise of water security[45] and agroforestry initiatives[46] to secure food resources as well as shade.

This project also shows that the Indigenous community has a good grasp of the change in animal abundance, even those they may not make use of regularly. This suggests that researchers can confidently turn to Indigenous leaders for information on changes in animal abundances in a region. Some Human-Wildlife Conflict studies in Panama discuss that women may have a different, often more detrimental, view of a type of wildlife than men, who are outside the settlement every day and may see the animal in its natural habitat, often being less dangerous than it seems.[47] Analogous differences could be considered in terms of noticing changes in animal abundance. While we did not consider gender here, an argument could be made that not all participants encounter or use animals equally day-to-day, particularly as it is mostly a fishing community. Despite this, many noticed the changes across several types of animals. This suggests that not only direct experience, but also discussions among groups keeps them well-informed on the issue.

There are some limitations to this study. The number of surveyed individuals was low (21 participants). Future steps for this project would be to survey more individuals and separate them according to gender and age in the community. The use of a mediator and

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[45] Megan Smeaton and Jessie Rivera-Fagan, *Reconstructing the Historical Memory of the Mesas De Concertación (Internship Report)*. Ipeti-Embera, Panama; Ancon, Panama; Montreal, Canada: The Organization of Unity and Development of the Community of Ipeti-Embera (OUDCIE); Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI); McGill University, 2010.

[46] Ignacia Holmes, Kathryn R. Kirby, and Catherine Potvin, "Agroforestry within REDD+: Experiences of an Indigenous Emberá Community in Panama," *Agroforestry Systems* 91, no. 6 (2017): 1181-1197.

[47] Fort, Large Carnivore Occupancy, 2016.

translator during the surveying could have had an impact on responses, as the mediator was a person of authority in the community. As mediators introduced the participants to the surveyor, we cannot discount possible biases in the selected sample. Developing a relationship of trust with these communities would be helpful for future surveys, particularly when it comes to conducting surveys one-on-one. Relatedly, other nearby communities could also be surveyed. Fortunately, past research has been done with multiple communities in the region, which can be useful for further analyses.[48]

In summary, this study helps to understand how a community of Indigenous Embera, an ethnic group who have migrated to the region across more than half a century, perceives current environmental changes, which will unfortunately increase with time. This could be generalized to other Indigenous people in this and other regions, including those who were relocated and others forced to migrate elsewhere to survive. It is therefore paramount that we understand and utilize the knowledge of communities on the frontline of climate and biodiversity change.

[48] Examples include Guillemette et al. *Building a Common Description of Land Cover*, 2017.

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The Taiwan-Hong Kong Refugee Crisis Since the 2019 Hong Kong-Beijing Crackdown

Melody Hsu

Introduction

In 2019, a highly controversial extradition bill was proposed by Hong Kong's legislature.[1] It would have allowed the Hong Kong government to extradite criminal suspects to mainland China, which implicitly includes Taiwan since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP[2]) does not recognize Taiwan's sovereignty and considers it as part of China. The introduction of this bill quickly sparked public outrage in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hong Kongers feared that the bill would provide the CCP greater influence over Hong Kong, thus exposing a higher risk to Hongkongers, journalists, and pro-democratic activists to become subject to arbitrary detentions, unfair trials, and violent treatments under Beijing's judicial system.[3] Taiwan, on the other hand, has been standing strongly with Hongkongers. As a self-ruled island with a fully extended democratic political

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[1] The bill was imposed in response to a murder case on 17 February 2018 in which Amber Poon was murdered by her boyfriend Tony Chan when they were visiting Taiwan as tourists from Hong Kong. After killing his victim, Tony dumped Amber's body to a river, stole her belongings and money, and quickly fled back to Hong Kong where he soon faced legal accusations. However, Hong Kong's court don't have the legal power to sentence Tony with murder since his crimes were committed in Taiwan where Hong Kong's authorities do not have jurisdiction. Therefore, Tony was only charged with money laundering. The only method to sentence him with murder is to extradite him to Taiwan, yet there are currently no extradition agreements between Hong Kong and Taiwan. As a special administrative region of China, Hong Kong cannot establish legal treaties with Taiwan since it is not recognized by the Chinese Communist Party as a sovereign country. Hence, Tony was only sentenced to 29 months of prison in Hong Kong. Upon his 23 October 2019 release, Tony has claimed his willingness to surrender himself to Taiwanese authorities to face proper trials for his murderous actions. However, until today, he remains as a free man in Hong Kong due to the ongoing juridical disagreements regarding his extradition process between the Taiwanese government and Hong Kong authorities, and due to the fragile political relationship between Taiwan and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

[2] This paper refers to the Chinese government as China, CCP, Beijing government, and People's Republic of China.

[3] The bill was also considered as a threat to Hong Kong's juridical independence, in place since 1997 when Hong Kong was returned to China by Britain as its former colony under the "one country, two system" agreement, which implies a promise of democracy and freedom of speech on Hong Kong territories for 50 years. Yet, China hasn't been respecting the "one country, two system" rule in the past decade. For instance, there is evidence that China has been unfairly detaining pro-democracy activists and censoring pro-democratic content in Hong Kong.

system and independent government apart from China since the 1949 Chinese civil war, Taiwan has been a strong opponent to China's human rights abuses in Hong Kong, and to China's constant threats to absorb Taiwan by force.[4] Since the election of the current president, Tsai Ing-Wen of the Democratic Progressive Party, Taiwan has been firmly defending its independence, international recognition, and pro-democratic system despite China's constant threat of invasion.[5]

After months of social and political unrest, Hong Kong's legislature completely withdrew the extradition bill in September 2019. Yet, the protests and demonstrations continued and have escalated into a major pro-democracy movement until today. The protesters have been requesting five demands. First, they request that the Chinese and Hong Kong governments not characterize their pro-democratic movement as riots or gangs-related activities; second, they request amnesty for arrested protesters; third, they request an investigation into alleged police brutality; forth, they request implementation of complete universal suffrage; and finally, they request a complete withdrawal of the 2019 extradition bill (which is the only demand presently met). From 2019 until today, Hong Kong pro-democratic protesters and their allies have been confronted by the Beijing government with rising violent and chaotic clashes between protesters and police. According to the statistics released by the Hong Kong government, between June 2019

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[4] The 1994 Chinese civil war led to the downfall of the Republic of China (ROC) and the rise of the People's Republic of China (Modern China). ROC ledChina from the collapse of the Chinese monarchy in 1912 until the Chinese Civil War in the mid-1950s. After the Communist Party took over China, and founded the People's Republic of China, political leaders of the Republic of China and its followers related to a nearby island, which is modern Taiwan – a self-ruled and de-facto country.

[5] Sources retrieved from major public broadcasting media and governmental websites, including *BBC News, The Foreign Policy, The New York Times, The Guardian, Washington Post,* and *The Office of the President of Taiwan.*

and February 2021, a total of 10 242 pro-democratic protesters and allies have been killed, imprisoned, or detained unfairly by the Hong Kong police and the CCP.[6] Under Beijing's rule, the pro-democratic protesters and their allies are considered criminals; whereas police and government are portrayed as victims.[7] Hong Kong's pro-democratic allies are regarded as a threat to the CCP's "one country, one system" ideology.[8] As reported in October 2019 shortly after China's grand celebration of the Communist Party's 70 years rule, "China's president has issued a warning against dissent, saying any attempt to divide China will end in 'bodies smashed and bones ground to powder."[9] On 30 June 2020, China's ruling Communist Party suddenly implemented a new National Security Law that targets anyone they deemed as a threat to China's national security. This newly imposed law has been criticized by *Amnesty International* as "dangerously vague and broad";[10] it applies to anyone, anywhere "regardless of nationality or location… [everyone on earth] can technically be deemed to have violated this law and face arrest and prosecution if they are in a Chinese jurisdiction… The Chinese authorities forced the law through without any accountability or transparency: it was passed just weeks after it was first announced, bypassing Hong Kong's local

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[6] Mainland Affairs Council. "The Quarterly Report on Review of Hong Kong's Special Status and Implementation Status of the Hong Kong Humanitarian and Project." April 2021.

[7] Janet Ho. "Sensible protesters began leaving the protests: A comparative study of opposing voices in the Hong Kong political movement." *Language & Communication* 64 (2019): 12-24.

[8] Sources retrieved from major public broadcasting media and governmental websites, including *BBC News, The Foreign Policy, The New York Times, The Guardian, Washington Post,* and *The Office of the President of Taiwan.*

[9] BBC News. "Hong Kong protests: President Xi warns of 'bodies smashed'". 14 October 2019.

[10] Amnesty International. "Hong Kong's national security law: 10 things you need to know." July 17 2020.

legislature, and the text was kept secret from the public and allegedly even the Hong Kong government until after it was enacted."[11] The law allows the Beijing government to legitimately tighten controls over Hong Kong's education and media, and to detain, imprison, and sentence anyone deemed to have offended the CCP. As *Amnesty International* claims, hundreds of protesters, journalists, activists, and NGO workers "have all been convicted of national security offenses simply for exercising their freedom of expression and defending human rights."[12] Beijing's rising influence in Hong Kong, the violent escalation of Hong Kong's 2019 protest, and the strict implementation of China's National Security Law in Hong Kong have resulted in an increasing number of Hongkongers to leave their home permanently and to migrate to other 'safer' countries. As an undergraduate student in International Development Studies, I aim to investigate the political and legal challenges faced by Hong Kong political refugees and asylum seekers in Taiwan from 2019 to the present through a social work lens. The first part of this present paper explores the social consequences of the escalation of Hong Kong's 2019 protest and the Taiwanese government's responses to the rising number of Hong Kong asylum seekers, including a discussion of Taiwan's ambiguous geographical and international political status, lack of refugee legislation, and struggles to obtain supports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Why do Hongkongers choose to migrate to other countries? Why is Taiwan their first choice of resettlement destination? What are the challenges encountered by the Taiwanese

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[11] Amnesty International, July 17 2020.

[12] Amnesty International, July 17 2020.

government in response to the sharp rise of asylum applications from Hongkongers? The second part of this paper investigates current non-governmental organizations' practices in response to the ongoing Hong Kong political refugee crisis in Taiwan, including a critical discussion of concrete suggestions for social work practice and policy changes that could positively address the Taiwan-Hong Kong refugee crisis.

Taiwanese Government's Response to Hong Kong 2019 Protest and Asylum Seekers

The Hong Kong-Beijing crackdown has led an important number of Hong Kong citizens to seek asylum in democratic and safer countries, such as in Taiwan, Australia, and the UK, as political refugees. Data from the Australian Department of Home Affairs and the UK's House of Commons Library (Dated from June 2019 to May 2021) shows a 184,143% increase of asylum applications from Hongkongers in Australia; and a 1010% increase in Britain.[13] In the East-Asian Pacific region, Taiwan has been Hongkongers' first choice of destination as political refugees according to a 2020 survey conducted by *Foreign Policy*.[14] Taiwan is regarded as a safe-heaven for Hong Kongers due to its proximity, high living standards, cultural similarities, and strong commitments in the defense of freedom, human rights, and democracy. According to the data retrieved from Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, "the number of Hongkongers obtaining Taiwanese

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[13] Nathalie Wong. "Goodbye, Hong Kong: protesters seeking asylum abroad from national security law vow to fight one, but feel survivor's guilt." *South China Morning Post,* June 22 2021.

[14] Lev Nachman, Shelly Rlgger, Chlt Wal John Mok, and Nathan Kar Mlng Chan. "Hong Kongers Say Taiwan Is Their First Choice As Exile Looms." *Foreign Policy,* July 8, 2020.

residence permits surpassed 10,000 in 2020… from 2016 to 2018 [hence, before the 2019 Hong Kong protests], the number of Hongkongers acquiring resident permits in Taiwan remained largely stable at just above 4000. The first significant increase occurred in 2019 when the number reached 5,858… in 2020, the number of residence permit holders surged by 84,6 percent to reach 10, 813", and it is a number that continues to rapidly increase.[15]

Why do Hongkongers choose to migrate to other countries? In broader terms, since 2019, it is possible to distinguish two categories of Hongkongers who have decided to leave Hong Kong and resettle in other democratic, or so-called "safer", countries. First, Hongkongers are forced to leave their homes due to the possibility of receiving unfair prosecution and punishment if they stay in Hong Kong. For instance, "Teddy boarded a small speedboat in Hong Kong last year to start his 600k escape to Taiwan" because if he had stayed in Hong Kong, he would have had to face "jail terms of up to eight years" due to "multiple charges in connection with the 2019 anti-government protest [pro-democratic protest]" under the Hong Kong's Beijing National Security Law.[16] As mentioned previously, the Hong Kong National Security Law implemented by the Beijing government legitimizes the suppression of freedom and human rights, including freedom of speech, thus legitimizing the criminalization of protesters of the 2019 Hong Kong

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[15] Matthew Strong. "Number of Hongkongers acquiring Taiwan residence permits doubled in 2020." *Taiwan News*. February 24, 2021.

[16] Nathalie Wong. "Goodbye, Hong Kong: protesters seeking asylum abroad from national security law vow to fight one, but feel survivor's guilt." June 22 2021.

protest, pro-democratic allies, journalists, and social activists that are deemed nefarious towards the CCP.

Second, Hongkongers chose to flee their home because they do not regard the Beijing government, or a pro-Chinese establishment, as a legitimate and safe system to live in. They do not have confidence in Hong Kong's future under CCP rule. As Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council noted in "Analysis Report: 24 Years After Hong Kong's Handover" (September 2021), the Hong Kong National Security Law "brutally stifles the power of checks and balances in democracy and leads to the "Mainlandization" [meaning Hong Kong's political atmosphere is becoming akin to mainland China that is ruled under the CCP] of Hong Kong's government system… Over 60% of Hong Kong people have no confidence in the city's environment or personal freedom in the future."[17] On the same note, a majority of young Hongkongers considered themselves as "Hongkongers" rather than "Chinese", thus implicating their strong national identity as "Hongkongers" apart from "Chinese".[18] Hence, Hongkongers' self-identification as Hongkongers, rather than Chinese-identifying individuals, could be understood as one of the main reasons for their departure and the conflicts between Hongkongers and Mainlanders.[19] As the professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Gordon Mathews argues in his article "The Hong Kong protests in anthropological perspective: National identity and what it means":

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[17] Mainland Affairs Council. "Analysis Report: 24 Years After Hong Kong's Handover." September 2021.

[18] Lev Nachman, Shelly Rlgger, Chlt Wal John Mok, and Nathan Kar Mlng Chan. "Hong Kongers Say Taiwan Is Their First Choice As Exile Looms." July 8, 2020.

[19] Mainlanders are the Chinese-identifying individuals who live in mainland China.

> Young Hongkongers fear that the city is becoming more and more like the mainland in progressively losing its freedom of expression and information. Mainlanders may counter that it is only natural that the city becomes more and more like the rest of China; Hong Kong is inviolably part of China. Hongkongers may say that Beijing has betrayed the (implicit) promise of democracy made in the Basic Law—the 1990 agreement that serves as Hong Kong's mini-constitution—while mainlanders may say that Hongkongers have been poisoned by Western propaganda and lack proper appreciation of being Chinese and all that this entails.[20]

As discussed previously, Taiwan has been a strong defender of democracy, human rights, and freedom despite its own continuous struggle with coercion from Beijing since the Chinese Civil War . Since the Hong Kong-Beijing crackdown, Taiwan has been a strong supporter of the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement. As Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen claimed on June 30, 2020: "China's disregard for the will of Hong Kong's people proves that "one country, two systems" is not viable. Many things have changed in Hong Kong since 1997, but Taiwan's commitment to supporting those Hongkongers who want freedom & democracy has never changed."[21] In response to the increasing number of Hong Kong's asylum seekers caused by the rising Beijing's influence in Hong Kong, the violent escalation of Hong Kong's 2019 protest, and the draconian Hong Kong National Security Law, the Taiwanese government implemented the *Taiwan-Hong Kong Office for Exchanges and Services* on July 1, 2020, as part of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council's Hong Kong Humanitarian Aid Project.

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[20] Gordon Mathews. "The Hong Kong protests in anthropological perspective: National identity and what it means." *Critique of Anthropology* 40, no. 2 (2020): 265.

[21] Taiwanese Tsai Ing-Wen's Official Twitter Post on June 30, 2020 4:59 am.

According to Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, the *Taiwan-Hong Kong Office for Exchanges and Services*:

> […] provides consultation and assistance to Hong Kong people coming to Taiwan for study, employment, investment, entrepreneurship, immigration, and residency, as well as customized services to transnational enterprises and international organizations for relocating to Taiwan. It also pragmatically handles matters related to humanitarian assistance and care for the people of Hong Kong based on national security considerations, in accordance with existing laws and regulations, and through public-private partnerships… [The Office] has so far handled more than 2,000 phone calls and emails about services provided since its opening [inquiring about immigration and settlement]… Each case would be duly handled in conformity with humanitarian principles and related laws and regulations… [The Office] would then step in to provide further assistance and guidance when it comes to study, employment, and daily care on a case-by-case basis… At present, [The Office] already have several successful cases where applicants have settled in, whether studying and working, and led independent lives in Taiwan.[22]

The *Taiwan-Hong Kong Office for Exchanges and Services* was created as part of the Taiwanese government's efforts to welcome and resettle Hongkongers, who have been affected by Hong Kong's National Security Law, in Taiwan. However, there is a catch: The Office could only help Hongkongers to resettle in Taiwan if they could make their own way there – both legally and illegally and only if the Hongkongers' situation could be handled "under the situations covered by Article 18 of the Act Governing Relations with Hong Kong and Macao… based on a joint review of the threat level of applicants' personal safety and liberty, along with the degree of emergency hazard in individual

[22] Mainland Affairs Council. "The Quarterly Report on Review of Hong Kong's Special Status and Implementation Status of the Hong Kong Humanitarian and Project," April 2021.

cases."[23] Hence, the Office handles each demand "in conformity with humanitarian principles and related laws and regulations" existed under Taiwan legal system, such as Taiwan's Article 18 that "decriminalize[s] the act of arriving unlawfully to seek political asylum", which implicates Taiwan's legal power to legalize Hongkonger's status in Taiwan for those who arrived on Taiwan's territories unlawfully with drastic measures via speedboats, for example, as political refugees.[24]

Despite the Taiwanese government's efforts in establishing the *Taiwan-Hong Kong Office for Exchanges and Services* to assist – to a certain extent – Hongkongers who wish to resettle in Taiwan, a later Hong Kong Humanitarian Aid Project has been the subject of harsh critiques by various opposing parties, scholars, and non-government groups. They argue that the Office lacks transparency on its resettlement assistance applications, processes, and practices, and it presents social inequity and financial discrimination towards Hong Kong asylum seekers. The article published by *The Guardian* on February 25, 2021, noted that "Lev Nachman, a visiting scholar [from Harvard] at the National Taiwan University […] said the increase in residency permits for Hongkongers was encouraging but lacked transparency."[25] As Nachman questioned, "when there are lots of people getting permanent residence cards is that because they're wealthy and have money to invest and are highly skilled?... Are the people coming here coming because they face the immediate danger that Taiwan was saying it wants to help or is it just for

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[23] Mainland Affairs Council, April 2021.

[24] Mainland Affairs Council, April 2021; Helen Davidson. "Number of Hong Kong residents moving to Taiwan nearly doubles in 2020." *The Guardian.* Feb. 25, 2021.

[25] Helen Davidson, Feb. 25, 2021.

any Hongkonger who can afford it and wants to get out? It's wonderful these options exist but it might not be able to help the people who are in the most need."[26]

However, is the Taiwanese government to be blamed for its lack of transparency and effectiveness in its humanitarian assistance efforts in response to the rising demands of Hongkong political asylum seekers in Taiwan? It is a contested inquiry to be challenged. In fact, it is critical to acknowledge the current Taiwanese government's efforts in assisting Hong Kong political refugees and in defending Hongkongers' freedom of speech and human rights when Taiwan itself has been continuously threatened with a forced invasion from Beijing. As Nachman argued, Taiwan's President Tsai "has resisted calls to introduce a refugee or political asylum system that would pave the way for exiled protesters to gain permanent resident or citizenship, wary that it could stir up trouble with China. Taiwan is worried about provoking Beijing by becoming an outpost for anti-Chinese Communist party activity just as the People's Liberation Army steps up military posturing against the country… [For instance,] five protesters who traveled illegally to Taiwan by boat last July [2020] were quietly housed on a military base for six months before being granted to the US on humanitarian grounds."[27]

On the same note, when critiquing the Taiwan-Hong Kong refugee crisis, it is also important to recognize Taiwan's limited capacity in welcoming refugees when Taiwan's political status and sovereignty are subjects of controversy. Today, Taiwan lacks international support and a national refugee law. For the past fifty years, Taiwan has only

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[26] Helen Davidson, Feb. 25, 2021.

[27] Eleanor Olcott. "China threat tempers Taiwan's welcome of Hong Kong exiles." *Financial Times.* July 10, 2021.

been considered as a *de-facto* country within the international conventions. As the journalist and McGill Alumni of 12' Erin Hale explains, Taiwan was "formally expelled from the United Nations by a vote of the General Assembly and replaced by the People's Republic of China, which had taken power in Beijing at the end of the country's civil war in 1949."[28] Therefore, Taiwan lost its membership in the United Nations in the late 20th century. Consequently, it is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, which implies that Taiwan does not have support nor resources from the UNHCR. Despite the lack of international support, Taiwan has been a strong supporter and defender of democracy, human rights, and freedom. As noted by Brian Barbour the senior refugee protection advisor of the *Kaldor Center for International Refugee Law,* "Taiwan has already acceded to international human rights conventions through domestic legislation."[29] For instance, as Barbour explains, Taiwan's "Executive has ordered the National Immigration Agency to develop regulations to implement human rights obligations, including non-refoulement obligations under Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."[30]

Conclusion: Practices & Policies Suggestions to Taiwan-Hong Kong Refugee Crisis

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[28] Erin Hale. "Taiwan taps on United Nations' door, 50 years after departure." *Aljazeera News.* October 25, 2021.

[29] Brian Barbour. "Beyond Asian Exceptionalism: Refugee Protection in Non-Signatory States." *Forced Migration Review,* no. 67 (2021): 45.

[30] Brian Barbour, 2021, 45.

In response to Taiwan's lack of refugee law and ambiguous political status, some Taiwanese-based NGOs such as the *Taiwan Association for Human Rights* (TAHR) have been working full-time with activists, volunteers, lawyers, social workers, and other professionals in assisting Hong Kong political asylum seekers, who are released from immigration detention centers, to obtain residence permits in Taiwan. While the Taiwanese government struggles to implement a concise refugee law that could legally welcome all Hongkongers as political refugees regardless of their work or education status/permits, "in the meantime, Taiwanese NGOs have adopted the rough division of labor, with some NGOs handling visas for Hongkongers that have fled to Taiwan, while others provide places of refuge or mental counseling services for those in need of it… To date, the number of Hongkongers that have arrived in Taiwan has been sufficient for this alliance of NGOs to cope with... [However], in the event of a large wave of Hongkongers arriving in Taiwan, [if the] NGOs are unable to cope with it, the government will be unable to either."[31] With that said, Taiwanese-based NGOs have been successfully acknowledging Hongkongers as political asylum seekers and aiding them to resettle in Taiwan. The *Taiwan-Hong Kong Office for Exchanges and Services* has also been successfully providing Hongkongers, who have obtained Taiwanese work and student permits, to gain access to Taiwanese residency as political refugees in Taiwan. The Office also successfully implements a cultural-sensitive and person-centered approach in assisting Hongkongers' refuge demands; it "has visited Hong Kong students, Hong Kong

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[31] Lev Nachman, and Brian Hioe. "Friends from Hong Kong: Taiwan's Refugee Problem." *The Diplomat.* October 23, 2019.

civil groups and related organizations, to understand the problems faced by them […] in order to coordinate resources from the government and private sector to provide timely assistance."[32]

However, the Taiwan-Hong Kong refugee crisis remains a grand problem that must be solved. In the upcoming months, the number of Hong Kong political refugee applications would only be on the rise in Taiwan; the Taiwanese government should implement further refugee practices and policies for the resettlement of Hongkongers in Taiwan, such as an implementation of refugee law. In a social work lens, I suggest that the Taiwanese government must identify the needs and vulnerabilities of Hongkongers as a group of political refugees; rather than assisting them in an individual case-by-case basis, in order to prevent discriminations against Hong Kong asylum seekers who do not have the financial means to relocate to Taiwan under a work or study permit. Similarly, it is important to note that the resettlement needs for younger and older refugees are different, such as health, financial, and adaptation variations and differences. As Eleni Hatzidimitriadou of the *European Center of the Study of Migration and Social Care* explained, "Migration is a phenomenon usually associated with younger people […] older refugees are frequently put at the back of the queue' and overlooked by aid programs due to assumptions that their needs are of less importance […] older people who experience forced migration and exile are faced with serious difficulties such as traumatic experiences in the origin country and during flight, health deterioration due to migration stresses, severed family and friends' networks, limited choices of resettlement

[32] Mainland Affairs Council, *The Quarterly Report*, April 2021.

due to financial difficulties and lack of support."[33] Hence, from a social work lens, the Taiwanese government shouldn't overlook the integration of Hong Kong political asylum seekers in their resettlement in Taiwan. The Taiwanese government should implement sustainable social work policies and practices in response to Hongkongers of all ages, gender, and financial situations to address various employment, housing, education, health, citizenship, rights, social connection, language, and cultural needs during their resettlement experience in Taiwan.[34]

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[33] Eleni Hatzidimitriadou. "Migration and ageing: settlement experiences and emerging care needs of older refugees in developed countries." *Hellenic Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2010): 1.

[34] Alastair Ager and Alison Strang. "Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (2008): 166.

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